Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2009 with funding from
Princeton Theological Seminary Library

http://www.archive.org/details/annualaddresstos00pete

EOLOGICAL SEMIN

ANNUAL ADDRESS

TO THE SUNDAY-SCHOOL CONVENTION OF THE EAST PENNSYLVANIA AND EAST GERMAN CONFERENCES OF THE U. B. CHURCH.

Delivered at Annville, Lebanon Co., Pa., on May 17th, 1870,

BY REV. L. PETERS.

SUBJECT: THE BENEFIT OF VISITING SUNDAY-SCHOOL SCHOLARS AT THEIR HOMES.

Dear Brethren and Sisters, co-laborers together in the great and good work of the Sunday-school:

Another year of life's toils is o'er; another year of anxiety and care, (but thank God, of joy and prosperity), is gone by; and we are permitted through a kind Providence, to assemble in our Annual Convention to take counsel together, and, if possible, to stimulate each other, in the great work of promoting *God's glory* in the Sunday-school.

Much has already been done, but there remaineth yet a great work; much has been said and written, and much may yet be said and written. Though I may not be able to add anything new, I may perhaps say something that will assist in stirring us up to practice that which we are already familiar with.

The subject to which I call your attention, this evening, is of more than ordinary benefit to the Sunday-school; and if practically carried out, will do more, in my humble opinion, than any other single means, for the permanent establishing of the Sunday-school, especially in Sunday-school missionary work, in cities and manufacturing districts, where the poorer classes of persons are to be found more abundant.

The Sunday-school is a partnership work, and consists of four parties, namely: The school, the parents and children, the church, and the teachers themselves, who, of necessity, must be the principal workers in the firm.

The benefits to be derived by the parties, as individuals, or as a whole, are many, a few of which I call your attention to.

The first benefit we claim for the school, is *numerical increase.* No other plan or system that can be adopted will so effectually add numbers and permanency to any school, as a regular system of friendly visiting scholars at their homes, and particularly is this fact true in reference to Sunday-school missionary work.

As a a proof of the truth of this fact, we refer to an essay written by Rev. James M. Freeman, and published in the *Sunday-school Times,* Feb. 26th, 1870, in which he gives the statistics of a certain mission school, and compares its attendance under the plan of rewards, and under the plan of systematic visitation of the scholars at their homes, with the following results:

From 1861 to 1864, under the system of rewards, a gain of *one* scholar. Between 1861 and 1866 under the samo *plan,* or *system,* the utmost monthly gain in four years was 48, or about 70 per cent.

From 1866 to 1869, for three years, with regular visitings, the greatest monthly gain was 91, or about 128 per cent.

We must not forget that in this school, the exercises consist mainly of teaching the scriptures in their "simplicity, with no rewards for attendance, with no music to attract, (for it is a Friends' Sunday-school), with no object-lesson to amuse while it also instructs; the most difficult of all classes to gather, the most slippery to hold, and the hardest to control, have been gathered in increasing numbers, held and controlled with a steadfastness, which can challenge any school to comparison."

I am inclined to believe that if we as teachers in our Sunday-schools were to adopt the plan of regular and systematic visiting of the children of all classes, rich and poor, at their homes, we would succeed, even beyond our most sanguine expectations, in increasing the numbers and permanency of our Sunday-schools. This plan will also, to a great extent, operate against the irregularity of attendance, which is one of the greatest weaknesses of our Sunday-schools.

John Hart, author of "Thoughts on Sunday-schools," says: "If

it gets to be understood, that the teachers will visit all their scholars, regularly, at certain intervals, and that they will, invariably visit in case of every absence, absenteeism except for satisfactory reasons will soon cease."

If the absence of our scholars be thus immediately followed up by a visit from the teacher, it will either shame them out of the practice, or drive them from the school, which indeed I think would be preferable to the fitful attendance of many Sunday-school scholars; and the irregularity of attendance, except for legitimate reasons, would soon be among the things of the past.

Another benefit to be secured to the Sunday-school, by the visiting plan, is a more thorough preparation of the lesson, and, as a consequence, more pleasure and interest to all. By the teacher's visits to the homes of the children, he soon learns the opportunities for study they have; it gives him an opportunity of explaining to the parents exactly what kind of preparation is needed for the Sabbath; and when parents see such interest manifested on the part of Sunday-school teachers, in behalf of their children, they will become more interested themselves, and engage (as they ought) in the work formerly neglected, either because they considered it of little or no consequence, or because they did not know how to perform it.

These are a few of the benefits, among the many which might be mentioned, that the Sunday-school will receive, namely: *Numerical increase* and *permanency, regularity of attendance* and a *more thorough preparation* of the lesson. If these results can be gained, and I am confident they can, at least to a much greater extent than they have yet been attained in most of our schools, we may expect the end to be accomplished intended in the institution of Sunday-schools.

The second parties or persons, to be benefited by these friendly visits at their homes, are the parents and children, individually and collectively.

It is sometimes alleged that Sunday-schools have a tendency to supersede parental training, and many parents act as though this were really the case. This is to be lamented; and none are more grieved at it than the earnest worker in the Sunday-school. We hear it said of old, "that it was the custom of the father to gather his household around him on the evening, or some other hour of the holy Sabbath, and give religious instruction on religious subjects."

If this custom ever were general, it is certainly not maintained at the present day, and it is feared by many that the cause of its decline has been the Sunday-school. This evil can only be remedied by regular and systematic visiting the homes of the children; pointing out to the parents the lesson; giving instruction, and thus reviving the good old custom, (if ever a custom it was) or establishing the good and *God* blessed custom of proper religious household instructions, and thus show that the design of the Sunday-school is not to supersede family instruction, but only an aid, and addition, a supplement, to what the father and mother can and ought to do. No device of man can do away with the parental obligation. God does not intend that it should be done by any means; therefore, one of the first benefits to be secured to the parent is an active co-operation of the Sunday-school in training up the "child in the way he should go."

Another benefit it brings about is, a better understanding between the teacher and the parents, thereby securing active home co-operation with the Sunday-school. By those friendly visits the parents will soon be led to look upon the teacher as a personal friend, and thus the way will be prepared by which the evil referred to can most effectually be removed. The kind and friendly relation thus established often leads parents to make the teacher an assistant counselor and adviser, even in worldly affairs. In cases of poor families particularly, are these beneficial to the parents; but the influence to be exerted is not confined exclusively to rich or poor. If you would draw the parents to the school, to the Bible class, you must not only give them your sympathy, but show it to them; not only welcome them at school, but be welcomed by them at their homes; show yourselves their friends, not only in word, but in deed.

Teachers, do not under-estimate your abilities or influence to do good to the parents of your scholars, for the very reason that, "their hearts are already opened towards you, by what you have done for their children; they are prepared to look upon you as friends; do not disappoint them." Coleman L. Nicholson says: "the way to the mother's heart is through her children;" this is true to a great extent, not only of mothers but fathers also.

The teachers can and ought to take advantage of their influence; find their way to the homes of the scholars, and there, under all

circumstances, either in the hall of wealth, or humble abodes of poverty, stand as a counselor, or comforter, as the case may be.

Especially is this so with the poor. Though their expectations in reference to themselves, have so often been blasted, and crushed by stern poverty or affliction, so that life's sweetness is wrung out, and they have ceased to look for great things for themselves, the bright colors have faded from their youthful anticipations to return no more; yet, hope springs immortal in the human breast, and they kindly cherish it, that fame and fortune have yet in store for their children the good things that have, somehow or other, eluded their own grasp; and few indeed are so degraded as not to hail with pleasure any effort to elevate their children. They welcome to their homes any who take an interest in their children, and are often open to receive their counsel and advice.

These are opportunities, which as Sunday-school teachers we should improve. We have neglected these opportunities too long, and while we, as protestants, have been sleeping, or standing criminally idle, the Catholic Church has been active in this work, and, as a consequence, can not only boast of adding Protestant children to their schools and nunneries, but Protestant parents to their ranks.

Stop, my brother; do not be so hasty, in saying these are mere notions, mere fantastic imaginations; pause a moment; look around you. See how frequent these opportunities present themselves in your midst.

In trouble, in sickness, in sorrow, the heart yearns for sympathy. Those of you who have sat under the shadow of some great affliction know the preciousness of that human sympathy, that leads some friend to come and sit with you in your loneliness, and help bear your grief. These are the opportunities God has given us, to point the stricken heart to himself, who alone can console; to declare in His name that there is, "Balm in Gilead," and "a physician there."

This is an influence that few other persons can so effectually exert as the faithful Sunday-school teacher; even the minister himself is often no exception. He who has been going in and out in the home of that little boy or girl, who are now gone to the silent grave; he whose name they have been lisping in their childish innocence; he who has thus, by his friendly visits, been twining cords around the hearts of the loving parents, is now, above all others, the one that can approach and show sympathy, give

counsel, and point them to the "Lamb of God." He can also point them to the "Home of the blest," whither their loved ones are gone—their treasure is in Heaven. Urge them to meet their loved ones in that rest: this is an influence for which, whether we we use it, or whether we forbear, we will one day be held responsible.

As an illustration of this fact, let me give you an instance as related by C. L. Nicholson. He says: "The father of a scholar of one of our city mission schools, on his dying bed was visited, occasionally, by an officer of the school, and after death had claimed him, and the wretched room grew very lonely to his wife and child, the teacher visited them occasionally, and offered words of comfort and sympathy; but owing to engrossing business, he was unable for some weeks to call and see his stricken friends. One morning, passing that way, he stopped in, the widow's face lit up on seeing him; she exclaimed, "Oh! sir, I'm so glad to see you; I thought you wouldn't come no more; Iv'e been several times around by your office to see if I could catch a sight of you; sometimes I did, and once I heard your voice talking to some men; it made me feel light-hearted like, and I told Johnny when he came home, I'd seen you and heard you talk. Oh! sir, when it gets so lonely here I can't stand it any longer, I go up to your place just to see if I can see you, and then I don't feel near so lonely." Eighteen months after this interview she came to his office again. Fearing she was in need, he offered some assistance, "Oh! no," she said, "I do not want any help; I just came to see you; my heart warms to you; you were kind to Bob, when he was sick. I can never forget you." This, my friends, is the result of a few friendly visits on the part of the teacher and officer in the Sunday-school; it cost them nothing and yet all the good accomplished, eternity can only reveal. This influence, we ought not, in fact, we have no right to throw away. Now, if these friendly visits produce such hallowed influences upon the parents, we may also expect some good to be accomplished for the children.

One of the first is: You succeed in gaining the confidence and affections of the scholars. Every one that knows and appreciates the influence of the heart upon the head, also, how slow the mind is to receive or understand that to which the heart is averse will see at once the necessity of gaining the confidence and affections of the scholars.

It is a fact which we cannot deny, that much of the difficulty

we have in our Sunday-schools, in training the scholars, is because they have regarded the teachers as their natural foes, and not their friends; and when this unhappy idea once takes possession, it places the child in an attitude of resistance against instruction. This difficulty can, to a great extent, be removed by friendly visits at their homes; and the teacher in a Sunday school, with an eye to business, as we sometimes say, will soon set about removing the difficulty. "Religious teaching, beyond every other kind, depends for its success upon the good will and confidence of the pupil." There are several reasons for this: First, Because attendance upon religious instruction is voluntary, to a greater extent, than attendance upon other instructions. Secondly, It is one of the effects of sin to make the mind averse to religious knowledge by vitiating the taste and corrupting the judgment; hence our work is hard, but much can be done to make it easy by the visiting plan.

The visiting plan also acts as a connecting link between the school and the home. Unless we can make the scholars feel and recognize that there is a connection between their home and the Sunday-school, if they remain at all in the school, they will feel irresponsible for their actions, while in the school; but let the teacher search them out at their homes; inquire into their circumstances; know their parents, brothers, and sisters; enter into their plans and hopes, their pleasures and disappointments; in short, become acquainted with their every day life; their struggles and victories; be ready to drop a word of advice here, of encouragement there, and christian sympathy everywhere, and it won't be long until you find your scholars as careful of their actions in school, as in their homes; and, especially, will this have a salutary influence upon the so-called wild Arab, with which every city and many country communities abound. "He has found a friend that feels for him; a teacher, that knowing the circumstances with which he is surrounded, can sympathize with his troubles, and help him overcome his failings." This will give him a self respect for his character he never knew before; and when you meet in school afterwards, his eye seeks the teacher with a new meaning in it. His conduct is much improved. He says by his actions: "The little Ishmaelite has found at least one man's hand which is not against him, and from against that one, he lets fall his own," and becomes anxious to please his new made friend.

Again, the impressions produced on the mind of the reality of

a religion that will lead the teachers, thus to labor for them, will not fail to bring about glorious results in the future.

The Church of Christ will also receive her share of benefit by the plan proposed in this address. The first benefit will be the cultivation in the minds of parents proper church sentiments; the teacher must show that the Sunday-school effort is not an outside affair, to be managed and conducted apart from the Church. The impression of many persons is that the school is an entirely separate arrangement from the Church, having no connection with it whatever. This accounts to a great extent for the conduct of many of our otherwise good brethren and sisters in the Church in reference to the Sunday-school; they act according to their opinion, hence, you seldom or ever see them in the Sunday-school. It is true, they do not directly oppose the work; but indirectly their influence is against it. Seeing no connection between the Church and Sunday-school, they have become accustomed to look upon it as a kind of innocent amusement, gotten up for the special accommodation of the children and young folks: enjoyments for which they have long since ceased to desire, because they have grown old; therefore so few grown persons, and fewer still of aged persons are found in our Sunday-school classes.

The same is true of the children in reference to the Church, they become accustomed, by the example of the parents, to regard the Sunday-school and the Church as a separate and distinct organization, having no union whatever; hence, as soon as school is over, they feel like getting out of the way of their venerable sires, thinking the Church is no place for them; and, therefore, while that good old parent is hearing the burning words of the gospel of Christ, and singing the praise of God, the children are excluded, or, at least, left to infer that they are excluded. This is all wrong, and the evil has long been seen and felt by the earnest Sunday-school worker. This evil can, to a great extent, be removed by the visiting plan. Let it be taught in the family to the parents, and to the children by the teachers, that the Sunday-school, while it is not the Church, is nevertheless the Church—the people of God exercising their christian activity in this particular way; show them that no means is more effectual, for securing the salvation of their children, and a proper moral cultivation, than a well ordered Sunday-school.

The church cannot do without the Sunday-school, and the Sun-

day-school cannot exist without the church: they are one; and as already said, it is only the Church exercising her Christian activity in this particular way.

Let these sentiments be taught properly by the live teacher, in the family, and it won't be long till our fathers and mothers, as much as possible will be found in our Sunday-schools, not only as officers and teachers; but they will swell the rank and file of the great Sunday-school army now marching on to glorious conquest, singing as they go, "I'm glad I'm in this army, &c;" and in return it won't be long until the Church will see the gathering in of thousands, coming up in the name of *King Jesus*, and placing themselves under the care of the Church, saying to your fathers and mothers in Israel, teach us; prepare us for the conflict, so that when you are gone, and your bodies lie silent in the tomb, and your spirits are singing around God's bright throne, we may take your places, and push the battle to glorious victory. Let the fact be understood, and followed up, as it ought to be, and the church will have her ranks increased, with many valiant and noble hearted men, who otherwise will be lost to the cause of Christ, and finally, lost forever.

And now, if these visits are important, and profitable to the school, the parents and children, and the Church, are they not so to the teacher? Are they to have no reward? Is the laborer to toil without pay? The sower to sow without reaping? Verily no. It is true, in this life of activity and business, we toil all week, day and night nearly, and on the Sabbath day we rush to our classes in the Sunday-school; hear them recite their lessons, then dismiss them from our sight and minds until the next meeting, and very frequently do not even know who the persons in the class were; very often if you meet them on the street next day you would hardly know them. These things my brethren ought not so to be; you have more to do in this great work, more to learn; and I can assure you, if as a teacher in the Sunday-school you adopt the visiting plan, your reward will be sure.

True it is not dollars and cents you must expect to receive, but something more precious and profitable still. "We need to pause" in our career of money making, and turn our minds to nobler objects occasionally; for it is "not all of life to live, not all of death to die." "We have need to pause" in our social and intellectual enjoyment; to consider the position we hold to the Sunday-

school, the Church, and our fellow man; to consider the responsibilities that attach themselves to our positions. And as a certain writer says, "We need to be shaken out of our selfishness, and dipt into sympathy with the poor;" we need to throw aside our pride of education, of wealth, of position, and stand side by side with them on the broad platform of *Christian brotherhood*, remembering that in that just balance that hangs above, in which we shall, all of us, be tried, there is neither prince nor beggar; there is but the undying human soul.

We have need to leave our ceiled houses, carpeted halls, and easy sofas, and find in "earth's dark places," cause for humble gratitude to the bountiful Giver of all "good and perfect gifts," for the many rich and precious blessings enjoyed. "We need to visit the poor," to learn endurance, trust, and charity. These lessons, perhaps, some of us have never learned, because we were never destitute ourselves, or were never among those who were destitute. Go out on this mission of christian love and benevolence; learn the great lesson of "endurance from some poor widow holding her household around her," struggling with poverty, while her loved ones are crying for bread, and the cold winter winds are making melancholy music through their humble dwelling. Perhaps that little boy or girl of hers is a member of your Sunday school class; you have missed them, no doubt, (if you have not you should) but you cannot tell what the cause of their absence is. Go, brother, leave your bright fireside, your cheerful and happy children, and find their humble home.

It may be, you will find the little boy or girl, destitute of clothing fit to shelter them from the cold, and hence their absence from school. Or, perhaps you will find them in, want of bread, yet you find them enduring all this, with less complaint, than you have been wont to make, when sitting in your easy chair, after you are done with your day's success. Go, my friends, and you may learn, "trust at the bed-side of the sick and dying," where some poor, pain-stricken fellow-mortal has been struggling with disease, lo, these many years, yet they are trusting God with a resignation that puts to shame our feeble, wavering faith. Go, learn "charity in the self-denying bounty of the poor to the poor." These are the lesson we may learn, as teachers, if we adopt the visiting plan—namely: humility, endurance, trust, charity, and gratitude to the God of mercies while the good accomplished, eternity can only reveal.

In conclusion, my dear brethren and sisters, I cannot leave you without saying, that if we would win souls to Christ, we must go, not only to the halls of wealth, but also to the poor of this earth; we must go at the masters bidding, to their homes, go in that Christian faith, that sees in every man a Christian brother, and reaching out to all humanity, would gather it to that fold in which we have found rest and peace; go in that faith that seeks in its actions, not for the applause of men, but alone for the approval of *Him* in whose cause are undertaken alike its feeblest actions and its noblest efforts.

BX9878.9 .P48
Annual address to the Sunday school
Princeton Theological Seminary–Speer Library
1 1012 00047 4256